

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

317

May 29, 2019

Honorable Ajit Pai  
Chairman  
Federal Communications Commission  
445 12<sup>th</sup> Street, SW  
Washington, D.C. 20554

Dear Chairman Pai:

We are writing to you today regarding ongoing efforts by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to identify more precisely where fixed and mobile broadband service is available or lacking in the United States.

Current broadband availability maps are based largely upon whatever information may be received from providers. Although the FCC's database may represent the most complete repository of such information available today, there are several problems with the current maps. The prime example is that the maps are not granular enough; in the context of fixed broadband, an entire census block will appear as served even if service is offered to only one location within that census block. This can result in denial of broadband network funding or financing in such areas, like through the FCC's Universal Service Fund or the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Utilities Service, leaving many locations without essential broadband service simply because they share a census block with a served household. Another significant concern is that the maps represent unvalidated reports from providers. While providers self-certify the accuracy of their own reported data, the processes used to verify such information before funding or financing decisions are made can vary and, in many cases, such processes do not exist at all.

In Colorado, we've seen a variety of cases that reflects a systemic, nationwide problem. For example, one Colorado telephone cooperative filed FCC comments in July 2015 in response to a competitive overlap situation. This cooperative is a rural local exchange carrier (RLEC) offering traditional voice and broadband services to its customers in a very sparsely populated rural area. The RLEC discovered that an unsubsidized competitor was erroneously claiming 100% overlap in its service area. In its comments, the RLEC included supporting documentation with an admission by this unsubsidized competitor that it could not in fact provide service in the area, but they were still unable to secure federal assistance. Due to the inaccuracy of the existing broadband availability maps, based on the Form 477, much-needed federal support was jeopardized, and eventually lost, because of inaccurate coverage data and a challenging process that did not adequately consider the evidence provided by the incumbent provider.

Furthermore, in 2016, another telephone company experienced problems with mapping and the corresponding FCC challenge process as part of the Alternative Connect America Model version 2.2. This telephone company is a small RLEC offering traditional voice and broadband service to rural residents in eastern Colorado. This RLEC discovered that the FCC had identified two companies as qualified competitors in several census blocks; however, the provider was able to verify that neither company could meet the FCC requirements of providing both voice service and data service of at least 10 Mbps up / 1 Mbps down. In this case, the FCC offered a small correction, which fortunately led to the release of partial funding. However, these cases provide evidence of the impact of faulty maps on funding needed to deploy robust broadband networks. Without reliable broadband availability maps, residents throughout Colorado, as well as across the rest of America, will be left without adequate broadband service.

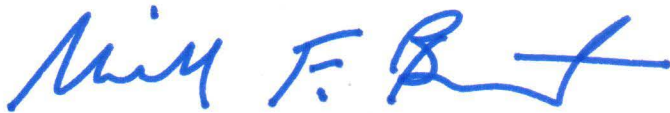
We are writing to ask the FCC to take immediate steps to address such concerns. First, it is important for the FCC to develop more standardized granular reporting of broadband availability, including considering the option of whether to require providers to submit shapefiles to demonstrate service availability – while also balancing the burdens of reporting especially for smaller operators, like RLECs. Moreover, it is important to ensure the accuracy of that more granular data.

Second, as the broadband case demonstrates, and FCC's previous Mobility Fund experience indicated, reliance only upon self-reported data will not yield accurate information or good results to deploy needed funding. We therefore encourage the FCC to establish robust and meaningful challenge processes that will enable better validation of both fixed and mobile data prior to relying upon such data in making funding or financing decisions.

Broadband access is a vital link to a range of necessary services and resources for America's rural residents. Not only is it an economic development tool for businesses that may be isolated from potential customers, employees, and legal services, but it broadens educational horizons for students and offers healthcare providers flexible and cost-effective care-delivery approaches. Thus, it is critical to ensure inaccurate information will not result in a denial of access to fixed or mobile broadband. A validated set of data based upon standardized methods of granular reporting will be essential to ensuring that universal service is available throughout rural America.

Thank you for your attention to this request. We look forward to working with you as the FCC continues to ensure all Coloradans – and all Americans – have access to robust and reliable broadband.

Sincerely,



MICHAEL F. BENNET  
United States Senator



CORY GARDNER  
United States Senator



JASON CROW  
Member of Congress



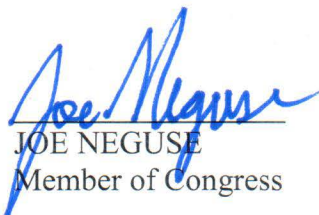
ED PERLMUTTER  
Member of Congress



KEN BUCK  
Member of Congress



SCOTT TIPTON  
Member of Congress



JOE NEGUSE  
Member of Congress





FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF  
THE CHAIRMAN

June 11, 2019

The Honorable Cory Gardner  
United States Senate  
354 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Gardner:

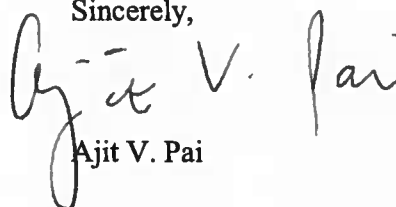
Thank you for your letter regarding broadband mapping. Closing the digital divide is my top priority. I have seen for myself in 45 states, including Colorado, and the territories of Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands what affordable high-speed Internet access can do for a community—for its families, its schools, its hospitals, its farms, its businesses—as well as the impact of its absence.

I agree that using updated and accurate broadband deployment data is critical to bridging the digital divide. We need to understand where broadband is available and where it is not to target our efforts and direct funding to areas that are most in needed. That is why the Commission launched two basic reforms to the collection of broadband data when I came into office. First, we initiated a new data collection for mobile broadband coverage as part of Phase II of the Mobility fund (which included a robust challenge process). Second, we began a top-to-bottom review of the Form 477 process to ensure that broadband data was more accurate, granular, and ultimately useful to the Commission and the public.

In your letter, you ask the Commission to seriously consider verifications mechanisms, specifically a challenge process to improve the validation of data submitted to broadband availability databases. I believe a public feedback mechanism could improve the Commission's broadband coverage maps and Form 477 data. Indeed, as you may know, the Commission's Speed Test App is one way that consumers can currently participate in collecting data about broadband deployment, and it has proven to be a useful tool for assessing service availability. I've asked Commission staff to look into other ways to collect and use accurate data from many sources—including consumers themselves—to assemble a more reliable map. We are interested in developing methods for the submission of reliable, consumer-driven data to better inform the Commission's decision making in this area. We would be happy to receive any input you or your staff might have on how to establish and implement such methods.

I appreciate your continued interest in working with the FCC to close the digital divide and look forward to continuing to collaborate on this issue. Please let me know if I can be of any further assistance.

Sincerely,



Ajit V. Pai



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF  
THE CHAIRMAN

June 11, 2019

The Honorable Ed Perlmutter  
U.S. House of Representatives  
1410 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Perlmutter:

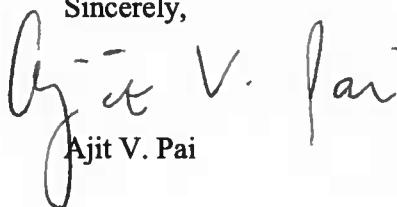
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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF  
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June 11, 2019

The Honorable Jason Crow  
U.S. House of Representatives  
1229 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Crow:

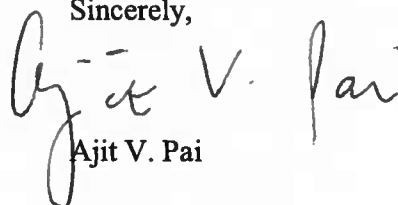
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WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF  
THE CHAIRMAN

June 11, 2019

The Honorable Jose Neguse  
U.S. House of Representatives  
1419 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Neguse:

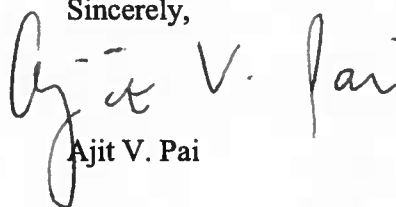
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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF  
THE CHAIRMAN

June 11, 2019

The Honorable Ken Buck  
U.S. House of Representatives  
1130 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Buck:

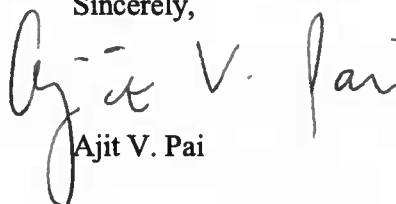
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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION  
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June 11, 2019

The Honorable Michael Bennet  
United States Senate  
261 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Bennet:

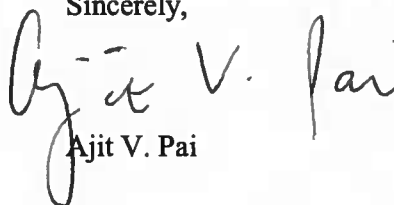
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June 11, 2019

The Honorable Scott Tipton  
U.S. House of Representatives  
218 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Tipton:

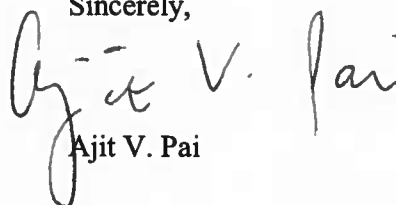
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